

February 14, 2010
Grove Presbyterian Church

My pastor read this text when I was ordained. All those who had a part to play in helping Christianity becomes something special. All those who made a big difference, even when that was the farthest thing from their thoughts. They were just trying to do what was right.

Listen:

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow-servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him. And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you. He is always wrestling in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, 'See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.'

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Reflection

My family, my friends, my faith and a belief that I could make a positive difference in at least to one persons life (but hopefully more) brings meaning to my life.

The other week Father Fauser of St. Josephs preached at the Unity Service, which nobody attended. He mentioned an anecdote about how Ghandi, the great Indian Noble Peace Prize winner, was impressed reading the Bible and wanted to become a Christian. That is, until he met a bunch of Christians.

Maybe he didn't know about these Bible believers. Three Christians and one Jew.

You meet them on the evening of February 2, 1943. For some, February 2 means Groundhog Day. For others it is a far more important day.

On that day the USS Dorchester, an army transport ship, was churning through the waters of the North Atlantic as part of a convoy.

A German U-Boat fired its torpedoes. The Dorchester was hit below the water line. The Captain gave the order to abandon ship. Of the 902 men aboard there would be only 230 survivors. I read from an official report:

"Aboard the Dorchester, panic and chaos had set in. The blast had killed scores of men, and many more were seriously wounded. Others, stunned by the explosion were groping in the darkness. Those sleeping without clothing rushed topside where they were confronted first by a blast of icy Arctic air and then by the knowledge that death awaited.

Men jumped from the ship into lifeboats, over-crowding them to the point of capsizing. Other rafts, tossed into the Atlantic, drifted away before soldiers could get in them.

Through the pandemonium, according to those present, four Army chaplains brought hope in despair and light in darkness. Those chaplains were Lt. George L. Fox, Methodist; Lt. Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Lt. John P. Washington, Roman Catholic; and Lt. Clark V. Poling, Dutch Reformed.

Quickly and quietly, the four chaplains spread out among the soldiers. There they tried to calm the frightened, tend the wounded and guide the disoriented toward safety.

One private found himself floating in oil-smearred water

surrounded by dead bodies and debris. "I could hear men crying, pleading, praying," the soldier recalls. "I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going."

By this time, most of the men were topside, and the chaplains opened a storage locker and began distributing life jackets. When there were no more lifejackets in the storage room, the chaplains removed theirs and gave them to four frightened young men.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains--arms linked and braced against the slanting deck. Their voices could also be heard offering prayers."

"And how can man die better than facing fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers, and the temples of his Gods?" -- Thomas B. Macaulay, from Horatius

By the way, three of the four chaplains were Boy Scout leaders.

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Wish Ghandi had met the four Chaplains. Or even this young girl in our next story. Living for God doesn't demand the heroic. Most are very modest.

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Come with me to a third grade classroom.....

See a nine-year-old boy sitting at his desk and all of a sudden, there is a puddle between his feet and the front of his pants are wet. It's never happened before, and he knows that when the boys find out he will never hear the end of it. He wet his pants.

When the girls find out, they'll never speak to him again as long as he lives.

The boy believes his heart is going to stop; he puts his head down and prays: "Dear God, this is an emergency! I need help now! I'm dead meat."

He looks up from his prayer and here comes teacher...

As teacher is walking toward him, a classmate named Susie is carrying a goldfish bowl that is filled with water. Susie trips in front of the teacher and accidentally dumps the bowl of water in the boy's lap.

The boy pretends to be angry, but he's really saying, "Thank you, Lord! Thank you."

All of a sudden, instead of being the object of ridicule, the boy is the object of sympathy. Teacher rushes him downstairs and gives him gym shorts to put on while his pants dry out. All the other children are on their hands and knees cleaning up around his desk. The sympathy is wonderful.

Now the ridicule that should have been his has been transferred to someone else: Susie.

She tries to help clean up, but they yell at her to stay away. "You've done enough, you klutz!"

At the end of the day, while waiting for the bus, the boy walks over to Susie and whispers, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?"

Susie whispers back. "I wet my pants once too."

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I admire what one church is doing with its youth ministry. The New London Presbyterian Church down in Chester County. They call it the RAKE ministry - Random Acts of Kindness Everywhere - where youth and adult commit to helping folks out with home repairs and upkeep.

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Wish Ghandi had met those 4 Chaplains, that little girl, the New London Church, or even this young boy in this story:

A little girl named Liza was suffering from a rare disease. Her only chance for survival appeared to be a blood transfusion from her five year old brother, who miraculously had survived the same disease. He had developed anti-bodies needed to combat the illness. The doctor explained the situation to her little brother and

asked him if he were willing to give his blood to save his sister. He hesitated for a moment, scared, but then took a deep breath and said, "Yes, I do it to save Liza." As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled as we all did, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded.

He looked up at the doctors and asked with a trembling voice, "Will I start to die right away?"

The boy misunderstood the doctor - he thought he was going to have to give her all his blood.

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Who will say about you: "you really encouraged my heart."

Remember, as the saying goes: just going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in your garage makes you a car. There are folks out there who need you to show them what it means to believe. All you need to do is see where someone needs you. All you need to do is be part of the solution. All you need to do is step up. Stop hanging around waiting to be told what to do.

Who needs your blood?

Have you noticed someone with wet pants?

To whom would you give your life jacket?

Be my valentine.

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There is an old ship I know that's stuck in the tidal basin
at low tide
Growing barnacles
Rusting away
Decks slippery from the mildew
Mildew of inertia
Algae creeping up the sides
Still a good ship, just ain't going nowhere, seeing others
sail o
And if nothing is done, dowdy is near, from dowdy soon to
derelict, just like Stan Roger's *Blue Dolphin* stuck in the
harbor mud, hungry for a scrap of sail that will never come

But this ship's seen some seas in its day
Something to watch
At times frightening to watch
You couldn't guess now but back in the 80's it weathered a
hurricane or two.
Welds blew, a few bolts too, buckled a bit, but made it
through

When this ship first set sail, it was a sight to see
It never was one content sailing with the fleet
Tossed the sextant overboard and just chose a star

Some admire banners and flags
Eyes drawn to the flutter, the pretty brass and glass
Those who know, know to look below
This ship split the waves
Dolphins surfed in its wake

Well now, I bet it still could handle a 40 knot wind
Number 8 on your Beaufort Wind Scale
Sturdy enough yet to handle a gale
Or a full head of steam
Its timbers still got dreams
Though the boilers might leak and pipes kick
Even though the wheel may feel a little slack
And the rudder doesn't answer quite so quick

Not a matter of conjuring a little excitement or thrill
Just a job to get done
A man just wants to feel worthwhile
Not that there isn't enough to do
If you would just get around to doing it
Sure ain't happening sitting in front of the computer
Waiting out the day
Playing solitaire, Facebook, emails

Erosive here to commiserate
Like barnacles and rot
Fouling the spirit with self-hate
Languor has a way of being toxic
Lying around feeling sorry for yourself
When it's time to start swinging away at life
And lick the blood away